

VOICES OF YOUNG UKRAINIANS IN GERMANY

Review of:

Ukrainian Youth between Yesterday and Tomorrow on Their Way: A German-Ukrainian Reading Book. Visbek, 2023.

Writer and Editor Artur Nickel is known for his excellent series of books, created together with marginalized youth from different sections of the German society who are too much ignored so far. With this new book, he gives voices to young people who are suffering or have fled already from the war in Ukraine, especially to the Ruhrgebiet in Germany, and invited them to express themselves in 13 chapters with headings like: About what we must talk – How everything began – My feelings are collapsing – We must flee – Stumbling stones on the way – From my diary – Breaking points and changes – Much has changed for me – One year after the attack – How it should go on – I dream – What I wish for.

Veronika, 16, writes: “There is no life yesterday, and there is no life tomorrow. So, you can only live your life, by appreciating the way, you are walking.”

Yaroslava, 13, remembers: “Suddenly something exploded and a tree, close to my school, fell. An hour later the same happened and we moved to the cellar... Finally, my parents returned. They had bought much to eat, tins of food and lots of water.”

Darya, 14, asks crucial questions beyond the war: “How do we create our societies in the future? We can only live together positively with respect, trust and mutual understanding. We want to travel the world...”

What makes this reading book special is at least two aspects:

– The voices of the young people are uncensored, most creative and diverse. By expressing themselves freely, already a vision of peace is created, as faraway it might still seem from now.

– All texts in this reading book are bilingual, in German followed by Ukrainian translations, in many cases these were the original texts.

This was possible because Dr Nickel co-edited this book with the Ukrainian German Teacher and German Studies Association (UDGV), which celebrated its 30th anniversary in 2023.

It might surprise someone that German as a language is so respected in Ukraine, knowing about the horrible history of World War II and the crimes of the German Wehrmacht in Ukraine in 1941–1945. However, it is just one of the important tasks of the UGDV to honor those German writing authors who had been persecuted in the past like Joseph Roth, Rose Ausländer, or Paul Celan. Rightly, the UGDV president Alla Paslawska and the UGDV coordinator Nadiya Serebryakova are mentioned and recognized on the cover as co-editors of this reading book.

A 20 year old student Oleksandr summarizes his dreams like this: “My wish is that we can move on and develop ourselves. My dream is that in Ukraine will be peace again.”

This very special book deserves much more attention as it has received so far. Perhaps, the German “Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung” can distribute it freely to a number of German high schools, especially in the Ruhrgebiet area, in order to facilitate a real dialogue among German and Ukrainian youth in our schools.

Lutz van DIJK,
German-Dutch teacher, historian and writer